

In one embodiment, the invention provides a method of inducing differentiation of an epithelial cell. In another embodiment, the invention provides a method for inducing formation of a barrier within epithelium. In another embodiment, the invention provides a method for producing differentiated epidermis. In another embodiment, the invention provides a method of assaying for genetic propensity of a patient to develop a disorder associated with epithelial barrier formation. In another embodiment, the invention provides a diagnostic test to determine the expression levels of Notch ligands, receptors, or other Notch signaling compounds in cells. In another embodiment, the invention provides novel Notch ligands. In another embodiment, the invention provides a method of preventing or retarding the progression of a benign or malignant disorder in skin.